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C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 000636

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S/CT FOR KEN MCKUNE

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TAGS: [PTER](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [KVPR](#) [ASEC](#) [KHLA](#) [SY](#)  
SUBJECT: HOST GOVERNMENT PRACTICES - INFORMATION  
COLLECTION, SCREENING, AND SHARING

REF: A. 06 STATE 190832  
[1](#)B. STATE 133921

Classified By: CDA Maura Connelly for reasons 1.4 b/d

[1](#)1. (U) Summary: The following is submitted in response to the Department's request (ref B). Due to the difficult bilateral relationship between the U.S. and the SARG, Post does not have the full access necessary to give a complete picture of Syria's information collection, screening and sharing procedures. The below information is compiled from our limited interaction with the SARG and observations at Post.

[1](#)2. (C) Watchlisting:  
--Yes, Syria maintain several watchlists, which are made up of terrorist and political-related hits. Due to Post's difficult bilateral relationship with SARG we do not have access to this list or know the number of records. Each security agency maintains and jealously guards its own watchlist in addition to Passports and Immigration. The SARG selectively targets subjects on these watchlists when it is in its national interest - based largely on perceived threats to regime preservation and the ongoing unresolved state of conflict with Israel. Hezbollah operatives probably would not make the watchlist while Sunni extremists and political activists who are critical of the regime would be flagged. This system may seem primitive and at times ineffective. When focused, the security services nonetheless have the talent and capability to protect against perceived threats to the regime. These efforts may occasionally overlap with U.S. interests but not always.

[1](#)3. (SBU) Traveler Information Collection:  
--Immigration collects information from passengers entering Syria from cards filled out by passengers at the POE. This includes basic biographic information, itinerary and purpose of travel. Post believes the information gathered is entered into a computer system. The Immigration officers have computers at the POE, but they are not always working and are only sometimes used. The information usually makes it into the system if it is derogatory. It is unclear how connected the systems are from the various POEs or if there is a delay in the information being shared. There are paper-logs at the borders that appear to be divided into Syrians, Arabs, Foreigners, and Diplomats.  
--Post does not know of different policies for data collection at the different POEs.  
--Travelers' information is collected by Immigration and SMI officers at land borders and other security organizations are present at the airport. Post has no knowledge of data collection at the sea port.  
--Post has no knowledge of formal agreements between foreign governments and the SARG to share information collected at the POEs. Post assumes that there is limited sharing of the information collected by the Syrian security agencies with

other governments, unless the SARG perceives it is in its best interest.

--Post assumes that the SARG collects Passenger Name Records (PNR) data on incoming flights and vessels. Post assumes that this information is used for intelligence or law enforcement purposes.

--Post does not believe the SARG has access to APIS, IAPIS or electronic travel authority systems.

14. (SBU) Border Control and Screening:

--Yes, the SARG uses computers at the POE to screen travelers.

--It appears that all travelers are tracked electronically.

Post does not know the frequency with which travelers are "waived through" at the POE.

--Post assumes that Syrian Immigration officials have the authority to use other criminal data when making decisions on who can enter Syria.

--The Immigration and Security officers at the POE regularly question, detain and at times deny entry into Syria to travelers. Usually no explanation is given as to the reason behind the decision.

--Post does not know the extent of information sharing within the SARG.

15. (U) Biometrics Collection:

--No biometric systems have been observed at the POE.

16. (SBU) Passports:

--The SARG has expressed interest in using a machine-readable passport containing biometrics information in the future.

--If the passport is lost outside of Syria the Syrian must obtain a laissez passer from the Syrian Embassy in the country where he lost the passport. Upon return to Syria he

will be sent to secondary for a very thorough interview. Depending on the result of this interview there could be follow-up investigations. It is not uncommon for Syrians to be questioned on this subject when they apply for other passports in the future. If the passport is lost in Syria then the Syrian will only need to produce a Syrian police report. There could be a follow-up investigation depending on situation. The replacement would most likely be for full validity.

--Post does not know of any official policy for "habitual" losers of passports. The environment in Syria would not encourage habitual losers of passports.

--Replacement passports have no differentiating features.

--Replacement/emergency passports have no differentiating features.

--Post is unable to differentiate replacement passports.

Post does not view this inability as an area of significant concern because of the negative attention a Syrian would receive from the SARG if he became a habitual loser of passports.

--No, replacement passports are not assigned a special number series or otherwise identified.

17. (SBU) Fraud Detection:

--Post has no knowledge of how robust fraud detection activities are in Syria and how focused they are on fraudulent documents. Post asks for document verification of civil documents related to visa cases at Post. This process can take around six months per document. Recently the SARG has requested the return of original civil document when the documents have been confirmed to be counterfeit. Post has heard that some of the individuals who submitted confirmed counterfeit documents have been arrested by the SARG.

--Post does not know of any actions by the SARG to take fraudulently issued documents out of circulation on a large scale. Occasionally document vendors are arrested, but due to corruption in the legal system they seem to be back in business in no time.

18. (SBU) Privacy and Data Security:

--Post has no knowledge of SARG policies concerning information gathered at the POE.

--Post does not know of any restrictions the SARG places on the collection or use of sensitive data.

--Post does not know of any accountability placed on the SARG to provide notice to the public on the implementation of new databases of records.  
--Post does not know of any laws relating to security features for government computer systems that hold personally identifying information.  
--Post does not believe individuals have the right/ability to access data that homeland security agencies hold on them.  
--Post does not know of any different rules that are applied to raw data versus case files.  
--Post does not know if a non-citizen/resident has the right to sue the SARG to obtain data from security agencies, but we doubt that it would be the case.

¶9. (C) Immigration Data Bases:

--The SARG has computerized immigration databases used to track entries and exits. They do not appear to be directly connected so there can be a delay in information dissemination.  
--Post observes that information is collected at all POEs - either by computer or manually.  
--The system is very basic, but effective. The drawbacks are that Immigration and the security services each keep their own watchlists and do not share information. There can be a delay in disseminating information. For example, Post has noticed that travel holds that are entered in Damascus are not immediately visible at the border. Post has also seen individuals that are identified as being of interest at the POE sent to security offices in Damascus for further investigation. The POE has usually written a number and/or note in their passport so they cannot exit at another POE without attending the security interview. This approach may seem low-tech, but is very effective.  
--Post does not know how often SARG immigration databases are updated.

¶10. (C) Watchlist and Information Sharing:

--Yes, there is a name-based watchlist system used to screen travelers at POEs.  
--The watchlist is made up of deported persons, terrorist lookouts, criminals and individuals who could be seen as a threat to the regime.  
--The SARG participates in a variety of Interpol programs, although the degree to which the SARG is willing to arrest "red notice" subjects is unknown. Our assessment is that

they will arrest individuals who are perceived threats to regime interests and simply monitor others.

--Syria has signed security protocols and MOUs with GOI through the Border Security Working Group. Post does not know if these protocols have moved from paper to reality. Post is aware that the SARG has an agreement with Turkey regarding their shared border, but does not have access to the specifics of this agreement.

¶11. (SBU) Biometrics:

--No biometrics systems are in place at any POE in Syria. Post does not know if the SARG is planning on introducing biometrics at the POE.  
--The host government does not issue a machine-readable passport containing biometrics information.

¶12. (C) Identifying Appropriate Partners:

--Post does not feel that the SARG would share or use U.S. watchlist data appropriately. Information provided to the SARG would be used to further Syria's best interest, which usually differs greatly from U.S. national interest. Political dissidents are included on government watchlists.  
--Syria's legal system is not sufficiently developed to adequately provide safeguards for the protection and nondisclosure of information.  
--There is no single consolidated database that the SARG uses as a watchlist.  
--To Post's knowledge Syria doesn't have a legal definition that it uses to define terrorism, but the SARG draws a distinction between "terrorism" and "resistance" that generally puts it at odds with the U.S.

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